

January 10, 2020

Ana Mari Cauce, President  
University of Washington  
Seattle

Dear President Cauce,

We, the undersigned, are alumni and long-standing supporters of the University of Washington concerned about the well-being of its students as well as the institution. In that spirit we request that you urgently consider the case of U.W. student Yueming “Vera” Zhou and address our concerns of the treatment she has received from the University.

Vera lives with her mother, Caiyun “Mary” Ma, in Vancouver, WA. Ms. Ma is a U.S. citizen; Vera has had permanent U.S. resident status since 2010. Vera graduated from Clackamas High School, Portland, OR in 2015 with honors. Her GPA was 3.8 which included 15 credits for college level classes. A main interest of hers in high school was competitive debate. (Exhibit A). She was accepted by the UW, started classes October 2015 and for almost two years was a full-time student. She excelled in her courses and felt honored to be a member of the University community.

Vera’s life turned upside down in 2017, first by a diagnosis of cancer and major surgery (Exhibit B) and then, in October 2017, when she was arrested during a junior year break while visiting her remarried father in Xinjiang, China. She was hand-cuffed, interrogated without representation of any sort and placed in jail without a hearing. Vera’s detention lasted almost two years, first in a prison facility “re-education camp” for almost 6 months and then home arrest for approximately 18 months. With help from the U.S. State Department and White House, Vera’s confiscated passport was returned to her, thus allowing her to return home to Vancouver, WA on September 19, 2019.

The two-fold cause of Vera’s arrest and brutal treatment is critical to why we write.

As noted in her statement (Exhibit C), one basis of her arrest as a “suspected extremist” was the fact that her father is classified as a Muslim by Chinese authorities, thus causing her to be inaccurately deemed a Muslim and targeting her for arrest as part of the government’s well documented brutal campaign against Muslims. Vera’s second and more critical arrest factor – particularly relevant to the University – was that she innocently sought to find her UW homework assignments by making a simple VPN effort to log onto the UW website. This act, falling afoul of the Chinese government’s crackdown to block access to U.S. websites and to punish those who do so, was the critical factor that moved the police to arrest Vera.

Facing imprisonment for seeking her U.W. homework assignments, Vera and her mother had reason to think the University would help them gain her release. Instead, it has manifested an attitude of not caring about her or wanting to get involved with her case.

While Vera was in a Chinese prison, her mother was frantic. Concerned not only about Vera's incarceration, Mary Ma worried about the lack of medical services available to Vera to monitor and treat the cancer. Ms. Ma turned to the University as the only resource she could think of for assistance. In seeking that help, Ms. Ma was regularly dismissed. For example, on November 16, 2017, shortly after Vera's arrest, she was put in contact with Daniel Brencic, Global Travel Security Manager for UW, who wrote back that nothing could be done – the school's position in spite of its advertised expertise and influence in World Affairs. She asked for help on other occasions in 2017 but the UW simply declined to take any interest in Vera's situation. Then things got worse. In fall of 2018 (Vera had now been a prisoner for about one year) Mary Ma started receiving tuition bills and then dunning notices from the University that continue to this day. Further, Vera's absence from school due to her incarceration in China put her into default status which is continuing and prevents Vera from returning to her studies at the UW. In addition, Vera's mother began getting dunning letters from student loan providers, to which the University, to this day, treat as a "not our problem" matter by advising Vera and her mother to deal with banks and federal bureaucracies by themselves.

After her fruitless efforts to gain help from the University, Ms. Ma reached out to human rights organizations and the U.S. State Department China Desk who expressed sympathy for Vera's situation and began to assist her.

*In the process of doing so, a State Department official contacted UW Administration directly and - stunningly – was told that the University was involved in negotiations with China over a million dollar deal and for that reason did not wish to be involved in Vera's case.*

Mary Ma also received assistance from ChinaAid.org CEO Bob Fu who hosted her for a series of meetings in D.C. around April 10, 2019. One of those meetings was with Congressional-- Executive Committee on China (CECC.gov) and we are told that a memorable moment occurred when a CECC staff person cried upon hearing the story of Vera and Mary Ma's experiences with the University. This staff person was a UW grad dismayed to hear that her alma mater had so abandoned a student in Chinese custody to gain financial considerations from China.

Following the April meetings, official protests from the U.S. were lodged on Vera's behalf resulting in Vera's release in September 2019 after 23 months in custody. One wonders if Vera could have escaped her dreadful treatment much earlier had the University shown elementary consideration for a member of its community and had taken seriously her mother's cries for help that began in November 2017.

The current situation for Vera and her mother is that they are faced with mounting bills for tuition, student loan payments and interest resulting from the period of Vera's imprisonment in China. Their limited family financial resources have also been seriously depleted during that time and, to top matters off, Vera is now classified as a defaulter and thus unable to continue her studies at the University.

What should the UW do now to help? We think the relevant standard was set by the President of Princeton University in the case of U.W. graduate and Princeton research assistant Xiyue Wang. As reported in a December 7, 2019 Seattle Times story, Mr. Wang was released last month from his unlawful incarceration in Iran. But instead of the cold response Vera received from the University, the President of Princeton University tirelessly worked on Mr. Wang's behalf--publically embracing him and openly declaring his imprisonment to be "completely false". In clear contrast to the treatment of Vera Zhou, Princeton President Christopher Eisgruber exhibited a positive and welcoming attitude by issuing the following public statement on Mr. Wang's release: "The entire Princeton University community is overjoyed that Xiyue Wang can finally return home to his wife and young son, and we look forward to welcoming him back to campus." The contrast between Princeton's treatment of its student in the Wang case and the University's treatment of Vera Zhou is seen in the bureaucratic letter recently sent to Bob Fu by UW Director of Federal Relations. (Exhibit D)

A final consideration moves us to write with urgency at this time. We understand that the Washington Post and television's 60 Minutes have interviewed Ms. Zhou about her case and are actively considering reporting on the story. Were that to happen we believe there is potential for significant damage to the University's reputation. We therefore think it vital for the University to address this promptly before things become unmanageable. We believe this can be resolved in a constructive manner for all involved and make the following suggestions.


1. The UW should lend its expertise and assistance to Vera to address her student loan issues and do so with the goal of resolving them and getting her back in school. We understand the University has taken some steps recently to help, but also understand that it still seeks to wash its hands of the federal loan program aspects of her case by advising Vera to deal with the banks and bureaucracies responsible for the programs by herself. Surely the University has experience, leverage and expertise with federal loan programs that Vera does not, and we call on it to employ its resources on her behalf.
2. University officials should immediately reach out to Vera and Ms. Ma publically, with warmth and open arms, to let them know that Vera is wanted and cared for, and that her return as a UW student is of high priority.
3. As can be imagined, the psychological stress endured by Vera Zhou was acute and is continuing. For this reason, we think the University should offer counselling assistance

to help get her studies back on track and to deal with stress and trauma related to two years of confinement in China.

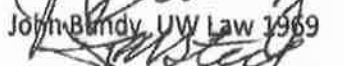
4. Finally, we urge the UW to offer scholarship assistance that will allow Vera to continue her studies despite the financial cost her family has paid during the past two years. Events since the arrest in China have depleted the family's resources and this scholarship assistance will also be a clear statement that the University truly welcomes her back.

We look forward to your attention to this matter and are prepared to meet with you to help resolve the issues described. Please direct your reply to John Bundy at 2320 W.

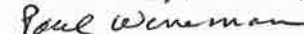
Commodore Way #200, Seattle 98199 or [john.bundy@comcast.net](mailto:john.bundy@comcast.net)




John Bundy, UW Law 1969




John M. Steel, UW Law 1970



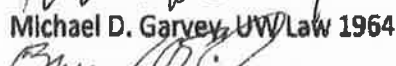
Paul Wineman, UW 1958




Emory Bundy, UW Student Body President, class 1958



Michael D. Garvey, UW Law 1964



Bruce Erickson, UW Law 1969



Sue Stewart, UW 1970

cc: Joel Benoliel, Chair, UW Board of Regents

cc: Yueming Zhou

cc: Caiyun Ma